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The Winter of Discontent

"If I have another month like this," said the President of the U.S. to an aide, "I'm going to give up the job." That was last January, and if Jack Kennedy had not been kidding, he would be back in Boston by now. For February was another gloomy month, and the New Frontier can only hope that March, which came in like a lion, will walk out like a lamb.

At Kennedy's Wednesday morning press conference last week (the afternoon New York Post was back in business, and the President wanted to hit at least the late editions), New York Timesman Tom Wicker put the proposition plainly. "Your policies in Europe seem to be encountering great difficulties," he said. "Cuba continues to be a problem. At home unemployment is high. There seems to be more concern in the country over a budget deficit than for a tax cut. In view of all these things, there is some impression and talk in the town and country that your Administration seems to have lost its momentum and to be slowing down and to be moving on the defensive."

Ebb & Flow. Kennedy smiled wanly. "There is," he replied, "a rhythm to a personal and national and international life, and it flows and ebbs. We have a good many difficulties at home and abroad. The Congress has not acted yet on the programs that we have sent forward, so that we are still in the gestation period in those areas. I would say that our present difficulties in Europe, while annoying in a sense, or burdensome, are not nearly as dangerous as they were then. As far as Cuba, it continues to be a problem. On the other hand, there are advances in the solidarity of the hemisphere. I think we have made it clear that we will not permit Cuba to be an offensive military threat.

"So that if you ask me whether this was 'the winter of our discontent,' I would say no. If you would ask me whether we were quite as well this winter as we were doing in the fall, I would say no."

The President's "winter of discontent" allusion sent reporters scurrying to their Shakespeares. In fact, it had been cited

two days before by New York Post Columnist William F. Shannon in an essay critical of Kennedy (in that same essay Shannon's colleague, James Wechsler, protested himself dismayed at the fact that press conference reporters keep asking Kennedy about Cuba).

Kennedy's press conference statement satisfied hardly anyone. Wrote Shannon the next day: "The presidential press conference, once a tiger burning bright in the forests of the Washington night, has become a toothless old animal." Wrote New

nation, in any era, there are going to be ups and downs.

This very fact has political value, of President Kennedy a marvelous politician, well knows. By readily admitting that things are not so good as they ought to be, any success, no matter how small, can be magnified and trumpeted as a major achievement.

Although he is widely conceded reelection next year, Kennedy is taking no chances. For weeks his brother-in-law, Stephen E. Smith, has been touring the country and touching up the Kennedy organization. At the same time, Administration stalwarts argue that, okay, maybe Kennedy has had to compromise on a few issues that he considered basic. But that is because he is a first-term President who must, to see his ideals come to bloom, be re-elected. Kennedy's second term, under the 22nd Amendment to the Constitution, will be his last. And so, unhampered by political considerations, he will be able to go all out for the policies and programs in which he believes.

In other words, wait until the year after next.

FOREIGN RELATIONS
Up to the Others

Everywhere that President Kennedy turned, Cuba kept popping up. At his press conference, six of the 21 questions were about Cuba. Reporters learned little from his answers.

Did the President have accurate information about how many Soviet troops have been removed from Cuba so far? No. Had the Russians offered the U.S. any way of verifying the troop pull-out? No. Was Kennedy satisfied with the rate of the Soviet withdrawal? No. What about charges that the Administration knew about the Soviet missile buildup in Cuba several days before finally taking action last October? "I have seen charges of all kinds," said Kennedy. "One day a distinguished Republican charges that it is all the CIA's fault, and the next day it is the Defense Department's fault, and the next day the CIA is being made a scapegoat by another distinguished leader. So that we could not possibly answer these charges, which come so fast and furiously."

When asked



THE PRESIDENT

A rhythm that rocks up and down.

York Times Washington Bureau Chief James Reston (who had earlier in the week wryly cited the Peace Corps as the only New Frontier program that has surpassed either promises or expectations); "As a public relations stance, the President's attitude has its advantages. It gives the impression that somehow today's problems will yield to patience and persistence. But will they?" Columnist Doris Fleeson got a ribald laugh out of Kennedy's press conference pronouncement. Wrote she: "President Kennedy has come out for the rhythm method of controlling reactions to the New Frontier."

First & Last. As a matter of political fact there is plenty to be said for the rhythm system for any President in any